

# Broken Premises

Stan Nussbaum, 8 September 2003

*Intro: the nature of changes needed today is fundamentally deeper than changes previously in our lifetimes so a different, deeper approach to change is appropriate. Examples: McKaughan on "missionary programs"; Tentmakers International Exchange on non-Western tentmakers.*

1. Features of paradigm change, illustrated by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) (see the "Paradigm Change" sheet). Other illustrations: Copernicus, Bosch, 9/11, EU.

2. Reflections on making huge changes in mission agencies now

- ?? Why they are necessary—a change of epoch in world history; a change in the speed of change itself
- ?? Why they are risky—betting the farm on a game of pick-up sticks
- ?? Why they are godly—yesterday's lie and tomorrow's truth
- ?? Why they are so difficult to decide on—corporate culture versus mission statement; familiar and skilled versus uncharted and untried.

3. A strategy for reconstructing broken premises

(see the "Broken Premises Tool" sheet)

## ***Paradigm change in Acts 15***

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Process of paradigm change	Example from Acts 15	Your parallel situation (if any)
<b>Encroachment</b> —something drastically new is happening, often suddenly at the fringes.	Gentiles are being converted and receiving the Holy Spirit without being circumcised (Acts 13 & 14).	
<b>Doubt</b> —an unquestioned premise is put in doubt.	Could Paul and Barnabas be right that circumcision was no longer the entry point for God's covenant? (15:2)	
<b>Disorientation</b> —if this premise goes, we won't know where we are, what we are getting into or what we will lose.	Pharisee followers of Jesus were unable to imagine salvation or Christian living without circumcision as the definitive starting point. They feared moral compromise and chaos (15:1).	
<b>High stakes</b> —Whichever way we go will determine our survival, legacy and identity.	Christianity would or would not remain a branch of Judaism, depending on this decision (not recorded in Acts 15; probably not foreseen).	
<b>Stark dilemma</b> —no middle ground in sight between old premise and new.	Circumcision either would be required of Gentile converts or it would not (15:5).	
<b>Choice</b> —whatever it takes to realign ourselves with what God is doing. (No hint that change is good for its own sake.)	Circumcision would not be required because God gave them the Holy Spirit and "made no distinction between us and them" (15:8-9). The position of Pharisee Christians was rejected.	
<b>Implementation</b> —make it official but deliver it personally.	A letter was written and carried by some senior leaders to the people affected (15:22-29).	

# "Broken Premises" Tool

## A method of identifying broken premises and moving on

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1. Our organization and methods were long blessed by God but now our system is creaking and groaning. What unexpected new pattern of events is putting the whole thing in doubt?
2. Which premises (or premise\*) that our system relied on seem to be breaking down?
3. To what extent were those trusted premises rooted in biblical and theological imperatives as opposed to the negotiables of culture and tradition? What evidence is there that God may be doing something new that changes our loyalty to those premises?
4. How will the future witness of our agency be affected by sticking with those premises, abandoning them, or going halfway to different premises?
5. What new premises might God be providing for us to start building on instead?
6. By what leaps might God maneuver us from the old premises to the new?
7. God only knows the unthinkable huge ripple effects of shifting to the new premises, but what inklings do we have about them? What attitude do we have toward them?

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\* If there is really one main premise that has broken down in your case, all the questions in the list can be converted to the singular